

1. [NanoJapan Japanese Language Preparation Guide](#)

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What language preparation is required prior to departure?

Prior to the Pre-departure Orientation at Rice, all students **MUST** memorize the Hiragana and Katakana letters, being able to both read and write. Failure to study these prior to arrival in Japan will make the first week of language classes very, very challenging.

If you have studied Japanese before (and already know Hiragana and Katakana), we suggest that you take this opportunity to review and/or study basic survival expressions and those relevant to science and engineering contexts (please see below).

Why Hiragana and Katakana first?

Japanese uses three types of character sets - Hiragana, Katakana, and kanji (Chinese characters) in a mixed way. Hiragana and Kanji are used commonly to write a sentence. Katakana is used mostly for foreign loan words and many science and technology terms. Hiragana and Katakana are the basic writing systems of Japanese and they should be learned first. Sentences can be written all in Hiragana or Katakana, but not in kanji only. There are 46 basic Hiragana letters and 46 basic Katakana letters, and they share the same set of syllable sounds.

See <http://japanese-lesson.com/characters/index.html> for an overview of Japanese writing.

Study Hiragana and Katakana: Suggestions for self study

Fortunately there are many online self-study tools, including the following that we recommend. But most importantly, make your Japanese study your daily routine from today. For example, you may want to set aside 30 minutes everyday for Japanese. There is no quick and dirty way to learn a language, and it's much more effective after all if you spend even 10 minutes **EVERYDAY** to review and study than 3 hours just every Saturday. Also, how much you focus on the materials counts more than how much time you spend.

To begin, see <http://genki.japantimes.co.jp/self/site/hiragana/hiragana.html>

All Hiragana letters are given on this page. There are only 5 vowel sounds in Japanese (did you know there are many more in English?) The table goes vertically for different vowels and horizontally for different consonants (that are combined with each of the vowels). Study first 5 today (the first vertical line) あ い う え お. Each letter is clickable to zoom in. You can hear how it's pronounced (SOUND), how it's written (STROKE ORDER), and even see some nice animation (MOVE). Practice saying each letter outloud (repeat after the sound), and practice writing. This printable Hiragana chart will help for your writing practice:

http://japanese-lesson.com/resources/pdf/hiragana_chart.pdf

Next (e.g. Day 2), review the letters you have studied so far.

Try Hiragana Master Drill. There are very useful practice tools here.

http://japanese-lesson.com/characters/hiragana/hiragana_drill/hiragana01.html

Then, study another 5 new letters.

You may go back to
<http://genki.japantimes.co.jp/self/site/hiragana/hiragana.html>

or use http://japanese-lesson.com/characters/hiragana/hiragana_drill/hiragana02.html

whichever you like.

Continue working with Hiragana. Keep in mind you should use the same “review and study” method. As you continue, you will need to review more, but it's OK as long as you don't take up too many new letters at one time.

After you have finished Hiragana, continue with **Katakana** in the same manner.

Again you can use either of the following, or both.

<http://genki.japantimes.co.jp/self/site/gakusyuu/katakana.html>

http://japanese-lesson.com/characters/katakana/katakana_drill/katakana01.html

To add variety, you may want to try self-testing tools such as Flash Cards and Listening Quiz available here also.

<http://genki.japantimes.co.jp/self/self.en.html>

If you already know Hiragana and Katakana, we strongly suggest you review/study the following.

Check out these 10 lessons of **basicsurvival expressions**. Topic ranges from Greetings to Health and Emergency. See if you can survive in Japan without speaking English. This will be good brush up for you even if you have studied these before.

<http://japanese-lesson.com/conversation/index.html>

Numbers and related phrases (rate, price, decimal fraction, fractional number, mathematical expression)

<http://japanese-lesson.com/vocabulary/words/numbers.html>

Survival technical Japanese

Things you see on your way to the campus and lab in PowerPoint slides (click 'Read Only' to open).

Getting to campus

<http://japanese.buffalo.edu/nanojapan/pp01.pptx>

Campus

<http://japanese.buffalo.edu/nanojapan/pp02.pptx>

Lab

<http://japanese.buffalo.edu/nanojapan/pp03.pptx>